

Guides students through the process of locating and applying for financial aid. Prepared by the Congressional Research Service for Members of Congress, updated March 2009.

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The basics: getting started

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Start gathering information early.

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Free information is readily available from:

- High school counselors
- College and career school financial aid offices (where you plan to attend)
- Local and college libraries
- [Student Aid on the Web](#) (U.S. Department of Education)
- Other Internet sites (search terms *student financial aid* OR *assistance*)

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Ask questions: counselors may know if you have exceptional circumstances that affect your eligibility.

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Be organized: use [calendars](#) to keep on track.

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Keep copies of all forms and correspondence: *you must reapply for aid each year.*

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Parents of students: save money long before your child attends college.

[FinAid: for Parents](#)

[College Savings Plan Network](#) (state "Section 529" plans)

Tax incentives for higher education expenses

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Good overviews:

[Cash for College](#)

[FinAid: The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid](#)

[Financial Aid: You Can Afford It](#)

[Looking for Student Aid](#)

[Mapping Your Future](#)

[Paying for College](#)

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Beware of scholarship scams -- don't pay for free information!

[Department of Education](#)

[Federal Trade Commission](#)

Student aid and where it comes from

Basic assistance categories:

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Financial need-based

Remember that students and their parents are responsible for paying what they can-- financial aid is a supplement, not a substitute, for family resources.

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Non need-based

Factors include academic excellence, ethnic background, or organization membership. Corporations may also offer assistance to employees and children.

Federal Student Aid:

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Provides nearly 70% of student aid under Loans, Grants and Work/study programs.

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Available to all need-based applicants; some loans and competitive scholarships for non need-based.

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Free information from the United States Department of Education:

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[Student Aid on the Web](#)

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[Financial Aid Resource Publications](#)

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Loans are the most common federal aid and must be repaid when you graduate or leave college.

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Stafford Loans (FFELs and Direct Loans) include:

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[Federal Family Education Loans](#) (FFEL) from private lenders, such as banks and credit unions, guaranteed by the federal government.

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[William D. Ford Direct Loans](#) (DL) directly from the federal government.

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[Federal PLUS Loans](#) parental loans, not need-based.

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[Perkins Loans](#) [[Download a free PDF reader](#)] for the most needy undergraduates; through participating schools.

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Scholarships/grants are mostly need-based and require no repayment:

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Pell Grants

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Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG)

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Other grants, scholarships, and fellowships, mostly graduate level: search the [Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance](#) (CFDA) by Beneficiary, such as "Student or Trainee" or "Graduate Student".

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"Congressional" scholarships:

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Named for Member of Congress or other prominent individual (such as Byrd Honors Scholarships, Fulbright fellowships)

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Merit-based and highly competitive

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Members of Congress do not play a role in selecting recipients

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Work study programs allow you to earn money while in school:

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[Federal Work Study Program](#) : college campus jobs

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[Student Educational Employment](#) : jobs with the federal government

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For questions not covered by the Department of Education Web site, call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-433-3243.

States offer residents a variety of scholarships, loans, and tuition exemptions.

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Check with your [State Higher Education Agency](#) and [State Guarantee Agency](#) .

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Consider prepaid tuition and college savings ("Section 529") plans: [College Savings Plans Network](#) .

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Search your Internet browser under terms such as student financial aid or assistance AND your state.

Colleges and universities provide some 20% of aid, most need-based. Check [university Web sites](#) and the institution's financial aid office when you apply for admission.

Private foundations, corporations, and organizations offer scholarships or grants:

[College Board Scholarship Search](#)

[FastWeb](#)

[Grants for Individuals](#)

Targeted aid for special groups

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[Grants for Minorities](#) : Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, Latinos, Native Americans, and Other Ethnic Groups

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African Americans: [For Students: Scholarships](#)

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Disabled students: [HEATH Resource Center](#)

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Foreign students: [Financial Aid for International Students](#)

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Hispanic Americans: [Scholarships](#)

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[Financial Aid for Law School](#)

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Medical students: [Financing Your Medical Education](#)

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Native Americans: [American Indian College Fund](#)

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Study abroad (for U.S. and non-U.S. citizens): [International Financial Aid](#)

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Veterans: [Education Benefits](#)

Interested in public service?

Federal assistance programs seek to encourage people to work in geographic areas or professions where there's a particular need (such as doctors in underserved areas); encourage underrepresented groups to enter a particular profession; and provide aid in exchange for services provided (such as military service).

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[AmeriCorps Education Award](#)

Volunteers who complete one year of service receive an education award for current higher education expenses or to repay student loans.

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[Army Tuition Assistance](#)

Additional benefits for Army personnel.

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[Bureau of Health Professions](#)

Scholarships and loans to needy health profession students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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[e-Scholar](#)

Scholarships, grants, fellowships, internships, and cooperative education with federal agencies.

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[Indian Health Service](#)

Scholarships for American Indian/Alaskan Native health profession students and loan repayment for persons working in IHS facilities.

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Military academies:

[United States Air Force Academy](#)

[United States Coast Guard Academy](#)

[United States Merchant Marine Academy](#)

[United States Military Academy](#)

[United States Naval Academy](#)

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[National Health Service Corps](#)

Scholarships and loan repayment for health profession students who agree to work in underserved areas.

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[Nursing Scholarships](#)

Offered in exchange for two years of service in areas with critical nursing shortages.

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Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC)

For students who want to be commissioned as officers after graduating from college.

[United States Air Force ROTC](#)

[United States Army ROTC](#)

[United States Navy ROTC](#)

Aid for private K-12 education: No direct federal assistance, check with schools themselves:

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[Coverdell Education Savings Accounts](#) : for elementary and secondary school expenses as well as higher education.

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[Children's Scholarship Fund](#) : partial tuition assistance to low-income students.

Repaying your loans

After college, the **federal government** has ways to help you [repay your loans](#) .

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Eligibility depends upon the type of loan, when it was made, and whether it's in default. Check with your loan officer to find out if you qualify.

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[Loan Consolidation](#) : combine your federal loans into a single loan with one monthly payment.

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Sometimes loans may be canceled in exchange for public service.

Teachers: [Cancellation/Deferment Options](#)

Health professions: [National Health Service Corps](#)

Federal employees: [Federal Student Loan Repayment Program](#)

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If you are having problems with your loan and all other approaches fail, contact the Department of Education's [Office of the Ombudsman](#) .

States, schools, and some private employers provide help in repaying loans in exchange for public service.

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Law school graduates: [State Loan Repayment and Forgiveness Programs](#)

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Medical school graduates: [State Loan Repayment Program](#)